

December 10, 2009

## Workforce Investment Improvement Act

Republicans are committed to a dynamic, results-oriented job training system that can effectively serve job seekers and workers in need of retraining. The *Workforce Investment Improvement Act* of 2009 builds on reforms proposed by Republicans in recent years to strengthen and improve programs and services under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to put Americans back to work and make the United States more competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The bill will eliminate duplication, enhance the role of employers, strengthen coordinating infrastructure, improve accountability,, and increase state and local flexibility to better serve our nation's workers. Together, these reforms will ensure the nation's workforce development system can respond quickly and effectively to the changing needs of job seekers and those in need of training.

### Increasing efficiency, focusing on results:

- **Eliminating duplication and waste.** The bill consolidates funding to streamline program administration and enhance efficiency at the state and local levels. Under current law, the adult, dislocated worker, and employment service funding streams support similar services targeted to similar populations. Under the new unified adult and dislocated worker program, funds will be spent more effectively and efficiently on services that will help unemployed and underemployed workers find a new career. The program will continue to be targeted to those most in need of critical reemployment services, giving priority to unemployed and low-income individuals.
- **Streamlining state and local workforce investment boards.** Under the bill, state and local workforce investment boards will maintain a business majority, and a quorum consisting of a majority of business representatives will be required for decisions to be made to ensure the workforce system is responsive to the changing needs of the local community. The legislation provides greater representation and influence for local business representatives, education officials, community groups, and representatives of employees who are frequently frustrated that they are not able to connect with or access resources from the local boards. At the same time, the bill refocuses the mission of the state boards to develop performance measures and goals to improve outreach to individuals and employers.
- **Ensuring the one-stop delivery system is demand-driven.** The bill requires state and local workforce investment boards to ensure the one-stop system is reflective of the workforce needs in the local area. To equitably provide for operational costs, the bill requires each mandatory partner program to contribute a portion of their funds toward one-stop infrastructure funding. The measure also allows training for current workers so employers may upgrade their employees' skills and encourages the highest caliber training providers, including community colleges, to offer training through the one-stop system.
- **Strengthening employment services to help job seekers get back to work.** The bill ensures employment services will continue to be provided in the One-Stop

Career Centers. To be clear that such services will continue, the bill incorporates current employment service functions into the description of a new category known as work ready services. For example, one-stop centers will be required to provide labor exchange services, including job search and placement assistance, as well as appropriate recruitment services for employers.

#### **Eliminating barriers to effective programs and services:**

- **Increasing opportunities for training.** The bill enhances flexibility in the services that can be offered to job seekers, combining “core services” and “intensive services” into a new category of “work ready services,” which will allow individuals to receive the services that best meet their needs.
- **Removing barriers to job training.** The bill eliminates arbitrary provisions of current law that prevent job seekers from accessing training immediately, even if it would most appropriately meet their employment goals. State and local areas would have the flexibility to tailor services to meet individuals’ needs. The measure also allows states to determine what standards will be required for eligible training providers, streamlining the bureaucratic requirements that have forced many community colleges and other training providers out of the system. Finally, the bill focuses on private sector job placement.
- **Allowing faith-based groups to help train and re-train workers.** The bill allows faith-based organizations to participate in the nation’s job-training system. Democrat leaders believe faith-based groups should be forced to abandon their religious identities as a condition of participating in the WIA system, arguing such groups should not be allowed to take religion into account when hiring staff. But the 1964 Civil Rights Act gives faith-based groups the right to hire workers on a religious basis, a right upheld in a number of major laws signed by President Bill Clinton.

#### **Fostering regional economic development:**

- **Creating Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) plans.** The bill allows state and local workforce investment boards to create WIRED plans to foster regional economic development, expand employment and advancement opportunities for workers, and promote the creation of high-skill and high-wage opportunities. These plans allow regional areas to integrate workforce development programs, one-stop services, and community and economic development funds into a comprehensive workforce development system.

#### **Strengthening programs for targeted populations:**

- **Improving adult education.** The bill improves adult education by increasing focus on delivery of the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and math; ensuring that instructional practices are based on scientific research; increasing integration with other adult education, career development, postsecondary, and employment and training activities; and increasing accountability for states and local providers to have measurably improved results in basic skills, GED graduates, and those entering higher education.
- **Enhancing vocational rehabilitation.** The bill includes a number of provisions designed to strengthen the 1973 Rehabilitation Act in a continuing effort to help individuals with disabilities become employable and achieve full integration into society.

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